

[Used t' row down Bayou Bartholomew]

[? - ?]

Accession no.

W 3716

Date received

10/10/40

Consignment no.

1

Shipped from

Wash. Office

Label

Amount

10p

WPA L. C. PROJECT UNIT

Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Ghost talk [Begin]: Used [?] row down

Bayon Bartholomew...

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Place of origin Chicago, Illinois Date 1939

Project worker Betty Burke

Project editor

Remarks

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(Ghost talk)

Betty Burke

Chicago

[?]29

Folk Stuff

Used t' row down Bayou Bartholomew 'long Free Nigger Bend. Only negro famlies farmin' th' lan' thereabouts, reason 'twuz so named.

They wuz an ol' house 'bout ready t' go t' pieces, way on back in th' bend there. One o' th' farmers had it fer t' store cotton in. Weeds so thick an' heavy, growin' eight feet high, look like a swamp, an' mighty hard t' git through.

Reason me an' John 'd go there, well, 'uz a sugar cane patch nearabouts that ol' shack, you see. We'd go there an' git us some sugar cane an' go on in th' ol' place. We'd lay 'round on th' cotton bales, eatin' cane an' tellin' stories, ghost stories, you know.

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Listen, one time we wuz layin' 'roun' like that. Well, we heard somebody beaten' in th' back wall. Noise soun' like somebody'd got a hammer an' wuz beatin' it on th' wall.

First beat on th' wall John raise up. Said, 2 "Whut's that!"

We listen, an' there it go agin. Look like somebody tryin' t' scare us. Seen th' back wall boards tremblin', an' dust asettlin's been hit such a hard lick.

"Mus' be a ghost, didn' like whut ah tol'." John he had been tellin' a tale, you know. Well, he 'gin t' git scared an' started t' go on home. Wanted me to come on with him, but ah said no, less'n he'd come with me roun' th' back an' fin' out who doin' that knockin'.

Ah say when he lef', wouldn' do it nohow, say it wuz mighty still an' scary an' all. But ah did mean t' see if 'twuz reely a ghost chasin' us out a there er otherwise.

Went on out th' front door an' stole 'roun' th' side. Peaked 'roun' th' corner an' seen a big black snake, look like a moccasin, shape of its head, abangin' away at th' wall with his tail. Jus' blammin' away, an' don' know why t' this day. Ten feet long if he wuz an 3 inch. Well, ah felt some better, yet an' still ah lef' there in a hurry, an' unbeknownst t' that big ol' snake abangin' at th' cabin. Didn' have no stick er such fer t' take on a bugger like that.

Well, knew 'twuz no ghost an' tol' John so, but jus' th' same we ain't never gone back t' th' ol' house t' tell stories an' eat sugar cane after that happen. Ain' seared o' ghostes, but never did care t' tangle with snake size o' that one.

End

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[Well, they wuz an old man, an old slaves you know. Ol' Mas' never would give 'im any kin' o' meat excep' Ol' salt pork. Never give none o' his slaves fresh meat.]

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Ol' Mas' he had a great lot o' hogs. F' that reason he useter keep a watchin' eye on 'is pens, 'gainst th' time one o' th' slaves mought git so he try t' make away wid a pig o' his'n.

Ol' slave Flowers, he useter git 'im fresh meat, jus' th' same. Way he could slip pas' ol' Mas' wuz a cryin' shame!

Said one time' ol' slave Flowers he got moughty hongry. He spit in 'is hands, pick up 'is axe an' stole on out to th' hog pen. Hit a big ol' hog on its head wid d' blunt side of his axes 'chunk! like that, an' slung 'im over 'is shoulder. Jus' ez he wuz comin' out t' take that pig on home he see ol' Mas' walkin' down th' road an' comin' his way.

Well! Poor ol' Flowers. Ain' nuthin' he could do, noplase he could hide; then. Ha' ter stan' there an' wait fer de judgement, sho' he goin' t' catch fifty lashes in de stocks, er have 'is work doubled in d' fiel's, anyway.

There he stan' when all of a sudden de hog on 2 'is shoulder sta'ted twistin' an' squirmin'. It had done woke up outen its stun, you know, an' Flowers he quick t' let go his holt. Hog slid down his back an' don' take 'im but a secon' 'til he back in de pen wid de res' o' de hogs.

Now you know that wuz a close call. Ol' Mas, ain' see nuthin' o' that hog, it bein' dusk an' him too fur up de road. Flowers he jus' walk up an' pass ol' Mas', innercent an de Lamb uv Gawd, 'tendin' like he jus' out t' chop him, some cordwood.

"Now that must uh been Gawd," Flowers say, "Th' Lawd 'uz with me that day!"

Yet an' still, thought o' th' Lawd couldn't seem t' hol' ol' Flowers did he git 'is app'tite whet too long.

One dark night he got moughty, moughty hongry. Went on out an' brought a hog back with 'im, 'spite O' all. Got 'im 'bout a peck er sweet p'taters, Ol' Mas' hog, ol' Mas' sweet p'taters.

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'Twuz two er three o'clock, somewhere abouts. Pot wuz aboilin', taters bakin' in de ashes.

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Time 'Taters git done, good an' hot, he pick 'em outen de ashes, brush 'em off good an' lay 'em long de rafter, say, "Cool off, now. Ain' fixin' t' be long."

Ol' slave Flowers feelin' moughty good. Settin' up there, so happy he go t' singin' sof' an' pattin' 'is feet. P'taters they ready, an' meat near about done.

Well, he heard feet ascufflin'. Somebody knockin' at, his do'. Said he could tell th' way his heart jump 'twuz ol' Mas'. Say listen he rreely felt bad. Still he answer, bein' he had to, you know.

Said, "Who dat!"

"It's me, come t' pay you a li'l visit," Ol' Mas' sho' enough.

"Well, come in, do come in, Mas'. Make yo'se'f t' home. Here, take dis cheer an' set." Slave get up an' make fer t' give 'im 'is chair.

Mas' wave 'im way, say he'd druther keep t' 'is feet an' not set. Ol' Mas' stan' an' look oroun' de cabin, jus' asniffin' away. Seen de pot.

Said, "Flowers, what's that you got acookin'?"

"Mas' theys peas."

"Peas, smell like that? Firs' I ever know peas t' smell so good!"

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They jus' peas. Jus' measly black eye peas, don't 'mount t' nuthin', Mas'."

"Sho' would like t' taste them peas. Nite like this I git hungry' walkin' 'round, Flowers.

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Ol' slave gittin' scared, gittin' weak ez water.

But he says "Mas', theys jus' peas. You don' want ol' mealy peas 'thout no kin' o' seasonin' to 'em, even. Ah know you don' like ol' cow peas. They ain' rightly fitten fo' you t' eat."

"That's all right, I ain' so p'tic'ler jus' now. Dish o' them peas would suit me fine if I had 'em."

Ol' Mas, go t' walkin' here an' there, asniffin' an' asnoopin' like a houn' dawg on de trail. Looked up an' spy dem sweet p'taters on de rafter, long row of 'em settin' up there an' smelling sweet. Mas' say,

"Whut's all this up here? Look t' me like you been scrabblin' at my sweet p'taters, look like."

Well! Ol' Mas' he knew he had 'im caught an' couldn't git loose.

'Yes, Mas'. ah'm uh sinner! Mas', ah got so ah jus' had t' have me a couple o' 'taters, ah had such a great hankerin' after a li'l bit o' sweet p'tater." Ol' slave ain' know nuthin' more t' say, jus' wait fo' whut sho' t' come.

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"Oh, that's all right, I don' mln'. You kin 'joy yo'se'f wid 'em." Ol' Mas' 'tend like he don' keer much erbout them sweet p'taters. Then he say, "But,if you got other than jus' that o' mine, 'twont be none o' my fault. Listen t' de devil, shure t' git whip'."

He stan' there erwhile, matchin' ol' slave Flowers, playin' cat an' mouse wid ol' slave Flowers.

Fin'ly he say, "I'm curious 'bout whut I smell in th' pot, never smelled nuthin' so good. Boun' t' have me a dish, whutever."

"Them peas, Mas'. Sho' 'nough." Ol' slave keep asayin'.

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"Goin' t' have a look at 'em, see whut kin' o' peas smell so sweet, then." Ol' Mas' went on over an' lif' de cover off quick. Said "Come here, Flowers, dese peas look moghty curious."

Flowers come an' look in de pot, look at Mas' an' flung up his hands. Said, "Lawd ha' mercy", them peas done tu'ned t' fresh meat!"

No, now, he didn' git away dat time, he never.

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Took 'im an' give 'im fifty lashes. Ol' Mas' say, "Now you kin have you some o' that fresh meat an' taters if you still want 'em, less'n maybe they done turned back into black eye peas, Flowers."

Flowers he wuz hurt too bad t' be thinkin' 'bout eatin' that night yet awhile. Tell you though, nex' night he sho' flew into 'em. Said almos' paid fo' th' beatin' he got. Yes, he did.

End approx. 1100 wd.

Material gotten from Leo King, son of a Negro farming family. Mother and father still farming near Sunshine, southeastern Arkansas. Graduate of a southern Negro college, now working in a chain drug store as pantry man or something like that. Friend of the writer's. Address, 5958 S. Parkway.

B. Burke